

Oporto. According to Mr. Wm. Tait, the Crossbill is a rare and occasional visitor in Portugal, merely appearing at irregular intervals. He informs me that a few individuals were observed in a garden near Oporto in November last, and that a friend of his at Coimbra University, between Oporto and Lisbon, had informed him that a large number of Crossbills arrived there in October, some of the birds being still in the neighbourhood at the time of his writing. Unfortunately no specimens had been secured, and on Mr. Tait writing to endeavour to obtain some, it was too late, for the birds had all disappeared. This is to be regretted, as it would have been interesting to have been able to establish the identity of these birds, and to know whether they formed part of the great invasion from North Europe, or whether they belonged to the local Spanish form, which is perhaps also resident in some parts of Portugal.

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#### XV.—*Obituary.*

DR. R. BOWDLER SHARPE.

RICHARD BOWDLER SHARPE died at Chiswick on the 25th of December, 1909, at the age of sixty-two. To the general public he was best known as the head of the Bird Department of the Natural History Museum at South Kensington, though, strictly speaking, this was not the official designation of the post which he so long occupied. To students and fellow workers throughout the world he was much more than this; for his profession was his hobby, and he worked at it with such unremitting energy and devotion as to distance all competitors in the amount and quality of the scientific work which he achieved. In his study of the vast collections under his charge he acquired an unrivalled knowledge of the bird-life of the world, estimated to include more than 18,000 species, almost any one of which he could name at sight, except in the case of closely allied forms, which would necessitate comparison with others. Further than this, he could tell

offhand the particular part of the world from which it came, and approximately the limits of its geographical distribution. In addition, he could point out its characteristic habits, its affinities, and peculiarities of structure in such a way as to astonish those who came to him for information. It was this unrivalled knowledge, aided by an extensive acquaintance with the literature of his subject, that especially qualified him for the preparation of the great work of his life, the British Museum 'Catalogue of Birds,' completed in twenty-seven volumes, with several hundred coloured plates.

To appreciate how this came to be written we may glance briefly at the events of his career which led up to it. Eldest son of the late Thomas Bowdler Sharpe (whose name was well known in the forties as the publisher of 'Sharpe's London Magazine'), he was born in London on the 22nd of November, 1847, and, after being educated at Brighton, Peterborough (King's Scholar), and Loughborough Grammar Schools, entered the publishing house of W. H. Smith and Son in 1863. In 1867, after a year with the late Mr. Bernard Quaritch, he was appointed Librarian to the Zoological Society of London, a post which he occupied until 1872. With so good a zoological library at his command, it was not surprising that his early taste for natural history should have been fostered and developed, and in the year 1871 he commenced to publish some of the results of his studies in ornithology, which included a catalogue, extending to seventy-six octavo pages, of his private collection of African birds, and a monograph (one of the first of its kind) on that very attractive group of birds, the Kingfishers. This was issued in quarto, with 121 beautifully coloured plates by Keulemans, most of the figures being of life size. If Sharpe had published no other work than this it would have sufficed to establish his reputation as a scientific writer on birds; but this was only the beginning of a long series of useful volumes which he was destined to complete and give to the world in a form both attractive and instructive. In that same year he cooperated

with Mr. H. E. Dresser in the commencement of a serial work on the 'Birds of Europe,' which, after the appearance of fifteen parts issued in their joint names, was completed by Mr. Dresser alone. This work, as many of our readers will know, is also in quarto, with fine coloured plates, and is so highly esteemed that when a copy occurs for sale by auction it usually fetches from £40 to £50.

As the collection of African birds above mentioned continued to grow in extent, it became evident to Sharpe that the text-books on the subject were inadequate to convey a proper idea of the richness of the African avifauna, and accordingly we find him undertaking a new and revised edition of E. L. Layard's well-known 'Birds of South Africa,' an excellent little manual at the time that it was written (1867), but not illustrated, and needing the incorporation of a great many species which have only come to light after its publication. The new edition by Sharpe, which was issued in parts between 1875 and 1884, formed, when complete, a royal octavo volume of 890 pages, with a dozen beautifully coloured plates. Meanwhile in 1872 he had quitted the library of the Zoological Society to enter upon his official duties as a Senior Assistant in the Department of Zoology at the British Museum, a post which he held until 1895, when he was promoted to be Assistant Keeper of the Department. From the date of his appointment in 1872 he seriously took in hand the preparation of the much needed Catalogue of Birds in the British Museum, and in two years the first volume of it was completed and published by the Trustees. Some idea of the magnitude of the undertaking may be gained when it is stated that this volume, the first of twenty-seven, contained nearly 500 pages, with fourteen coloured plates. Of the twenty-seven volumes of the great Catalogue Sharpe himself wrote eleven whole volumes besides portions of three others, and edited or assisted in the preparation of the remainder, which were undertaken by other specialists. Naturally the production of so long a series extended over several years, and, as if that were not work enough to occupy his daily thoughts, he found time before and after official hours to write and publish several

other works of importance, as well as sections or parts of general works that were then in progress. Thus in 1875 appeared his section on "Birds" which formed part of the Zoology of the Voyage of H.M.Ss. 'Erebus' and 'Terror,' under the command of Capt. Sir James Clark Ross, R.N., and his treatise on the class Aves in 'Cassell's Natural History,' which was edited, in six volumes, by Professor P. Martin Duncan. Then came his Monograph on the Swallows, commenced with C. W. Wyatt in 1885. Between 1875 and 1888, after the death of John Gould, extraordinary as it may appear, he actually found time to complete the beautiful folio works which Gould had left unfinished, such as 'The Birds of Asia,' 'The Birds of New Guinea,' and the Monographs on the Trogons, the Humming Birds, and the Pittas or Ground Thrushes—all admirably worked out on the lines indicated by Gould. Similarly in the case of Seebohm's 'British Birds' Eggs,' the plates of which had been prepared but the text was unwritten at the time of Seebohm's death in November 1895, Sharpe came to the rescue and completed the work, which was published in 1896. This was, perhaps, the least satisfactory of all his publications; for, in the first place, he was handicapped by the fact (as stated in the Preface) that Seebohm "had planned out and settled the order of the plates," with the result that he had to adopt a most confusing classification which he could not approve; and, in the next place, he himself had not paid such close attention to British Oology as would enable him to do justice to the subject. The coloured plates are for the most part excellent, but the text was not up-to-date, even at the time it was written.

For several years, as recorder of the Class Aves, Sharpe undertook and accomplished an extraordinary amount of work for the 'Zoological Record,' which earned for him the universal appreciation and gratitude of ornithologists. Of his more popular publications mention should be made of the four small octavo volumes on 'British Birds' which he contributed to Allen's 'Naturalist's Library' (1894-97), and his 'Sketch-Book of British Birds,' with coloured figures in the text, published in 1898 by the S. P. C. K. In the same

year appeared his 'Wonders of the Bird World,' containing the gist of the popular lectures given by him in different parts of the country, which, illustrated by lantern-slides designed by Keulemans, never failed to delight large audiences.

Nor should we omit to notice here his edition of White's 'Selborne,' which appeared in two volumes in 1900. His knowledge of the locality, where at one time he had a residence, and the ornithological observations which he made there, enabled him to supply many editorial notes of interest. For his sake, it is to be regretted that this work is disfigured by a number of full-page plates which are anything but artistic, and in many cases are grotesque. For this ill-fortune, however, he was not responsible.

To give here a list of the numerous papers contributed by Sharpe to scientific periodicals would be impossible in the space at my disposal. Suffice it to say that in the pages of the 'Ibis,' the 'Journal of the Linnean Society,' the 'Proceedings of the Zoological Society,' the 'Annals and Magazine of Natural History,' and even in foreign publications, such as the 'Bulletin' of the Zoological Society of France, and the 'Mittheilungen' of the Royal Zoological Museum of Dresden, as well as in the 'Notes from the Leyden Museum,' will be found an extraordinary number of contributions from his pen, many of which are of considerable scientific importance.

Reference to 'The Ibis' recalls the fact that Sharpe was elected a member of the British Ornithologists' Union in 1871, from which date to the time of his death he was one of the most active and energetic supporters of its objects, as well as one of the most frequent contributors to 'The Ibis.' The British Ornithologists' Club, to which only members of the Union are eligible, may be said to have been founded by Sharpe, for it was at his instigation and encouragement that they perceived the advantages that would arise from evening meetings, held once a month, for the discussion of subjects of general interest in the bird-world, and the exhibition of rare or little-known specimens

from all parts of the globe, a record of the proceedings being subsequently printed in the 'Bulletin' of the Club.

Although Dr. Sharpe had not much leisure for foreign travel beyond an occasional trip to Paris or Berlin, or an autumn holiday in Norway, his official position once enabled him to undertake a notable journey to India for the purpose of superintending the package and transport of a valuable collection of birds and mammals which (on the condition of his taking charge of it) had been presented to the British Museum by Mr. A. O. Hume, of Simla. Accordingly Sharpe went out to arrange for its safe dispatch to London, a matter of no slight difficulty, seeing that it contained no less than 63,000 birds, 18,500 eggs, and 500 mammals. This incident recalls the fact that in several other instances the Nation has been indebted to Dr. Sharpe for most valuable collections presented to the Museum more or less through his instrumentality. To quote from his address as President of the Fourth International Ornithological Congress, held in London in June 1905, the following lines will shew how enormously the collections under his charge at the Museum were increased during his term of office: "It has been up to the present time (1905) impossible to prepare an exact estimate of the number of birds and eggs in the British Museum . . . At the lowest computation the specimens must number 400,000, and at the time when I assumed office in 1872 a liberal estimate of the collection of birds and eggs would be 35,000: it probably did not exceed 30,000."

The services thus rendered to science by Dr. Sharpe, in the care of and enormous increase to the collections under his charge, in the valuable Catalogue of Birds already referred to, besides a subsequent 'Hand-list of Birds' in five volumes, and in the numerous monographs and papers of importance which were independently published by him, are such as have never been achieved by one man in his lifetime, and in the opinion of his fellow workers, who are best qualified to express their views on the subject, some adequate recognition of such services by the Treasury on the recommendation of